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NOVEMBER 1981

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CORONER/MEDICAL EXAMINER SEMINARS

The Montana Coroner's Association and The Division of Forensic Science are presenting two day seminars on Death Investigation; November 9th and 10th in Butte, and November 12th and 13th in Sidney. The seminars are sponsored by the Montana Law Enforcement Academy.

TEACHING SESSIONS

Jim Hutchison, Janis Fulton and Ron Rivers will present a paper on cocaine contaminents to the Northwest Association of Forensic Scientists in Nevada; November 4th - 7th. Ken Konzak will also be a panel moderator.

Dr. Rivers attended the Forensic Pathology Program at the American Society of Clinical Pathology on October 17th - 23rd in Las Vegas, Nevada. Courses included High Velocity Gunshot Wounds, Identification of Skeletal Remains, and Interpretive Forensic Toxicology.

WELCOME

Glenn Welker has joined the staff at the Crime Lab, and we welcome him to the Chemistry Department.

ON CALL SCHEDULE - MONTANA STATE MEDICAL EXAMINER

NOVEMBER 1981

275 W. Front Street
Missoula, Montana 59802

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1	2	3	4	5	6	7 JOHN PFAFF
8 JOHN PFAFF	9	10	11	12	13	14 RON RIVERS
15 RON RIVERS	16	17	18	19	20	21 JOHN PFAFF
22 JOHN PFAFF	23	24	25	26	27	28 KEN MUELLER
29 KEN MUELLER	30					

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Hospital - 727-3333
Home - 727-3905

Dr. Ken Mueller- Billings
Hospital - 657-7000
Home - 248-3024

November 1981
CARBON MONOXIDE POISONING
R. L. Rivers, M.D.

The first page of the story in the November Newsletter was not sent to you. The following is the complete true story:

The doctor's worried wife was waiting at the door when he got home for lunch. "Chris and Tony are terribly ill," said Mrs. Wilson; and she handed her husband a letter. It had arrived that morning from college, where their son and daughter-in-law, both 19, were university sophomores. Dr. Wilson began to read:

"Dear Folks: I am sorry I took so long in writing, but we moved to a different place Monday, and we have been too busy trying to get things in order. Last night Chris passed out on the couch, only I wasn't here when it happened, and when I got here I thought she had just fallen asleep. This morning at 5:00 she called me to help her off the couch because she couldn't get up. She vomited while asleep. As soon as I got out of bed, I passed out on the floor. After I regained my senses, I got up to walk outside and get some fresh air, and as soon as I walked out the door I passed out again and fell down five concrete steps. I've got scratches and bruises all over me, and I'm so sore I can hardly move."

"After we got up in the morning, we both vomited. Chris went back to bed, but I went to classes. Chris went to her afternoon classes, and so did I. I've been feeling somewhat better this afternoon, but worse tonight."

Dr. Wilson paused to consider. They were feeling better after they had been away from the house. The house, he decided, must be the source of the trouble.

"Chris has been heaving up all day. The doctor over at the school thought we had some kind of virus and gave us some medicine, but it hasn't done any good. I can't imagine why we passed out like we did. We both seem to have the same thing - a tremendous headache, continuous dizziness, upset stomach and heaving all day. If you have any idea what it is, please send something for it. I had better quit now. I am so dizzy I can't even light."

Young Tony Wilson meant "write". He had not corrected that last word, but like the good drafting and design student he is, he had neatly organized the essential facts for his father. "It doesn't sound like a virus to me," said Mrs. Wilson. "It sounds like ptomaine."

Dr. Wilson answered, "It's worse than that..." He reached hurriedly for the phone. Tony had written his landlady's phone number in a last minute postscript, and Dr. Wilson got a long distance call through with no delay.

A maid answered. Dr. Wilson asked her to go to Tony and Chris's little cottage and call his son to the phone. When the maid returned and told Dr. Wilson she could not arouse anyone, he shouted back at her, "Go out there and break in a window."

The aroused landlady joined the maid and checked the cottage. "I saw them lying in bed," she reported to Dr. Wilson. "They were sweating up a storm".

Dr. Wilson roared back, "Haven't you got in the house yet?"

The landlady told Dr. Wilson to hang up so that she could get the maid to call the Fire Department, then she grabbed a hammer herself. She broke a small pane in the door and reached in to release the latch. Intense heat blasted into her face. "It was just like opening the door to a furnace," she said. She raced through the house opening windows and doors, and then began rubbing her unconscious tenants' faces with cold wet towels. Chris recovered and remarked, "I blacked out." The firemen had to use a resuscitator on Tony before he came around.

At the hospital emergency room where the pair spent four tense days recovering, a doctor said, "Fifteen minutes later would have been too late; they would have been dead."

Of Tony's letter, his father said simply, "It was a perfect case history and a clear message to me." That message was carbon monoxide poisoning." Ninety miles away, firemen found a blocked furnace ventilator pipe that was forcing carbon monoxide back into the cottage. Dr. Wilson's diagnosis was confirmed.

The above report was excerpted from Time Magazine, 1963

Whenever two or more people are found sick together or dead together, think of carbon monoxide poisoning.

The determination of carbon monoxide in the blood is a difficult laboratory test. Establishing standards and quantitating values in the lower ranges demands a careful procedure. The test is not routinely included in a drug screen, and it must be specifically requested.

If whole blood is not collected, or if the victim is anemic, the test may show a false negative or incorrectly low value.